

Fact Sheet #4



Region 10

John Day Vapor Response

John Day, Oregon

Friday, June 5, 2015

An EPA Emergency Response Team has been helping the City of John Day and the State of Oregon investigate unusual odors in and around homes and commercial buildings along South Canyon Boulevard and SW Brent Street between SW 2nd Avenue and SW 6th Avenue.

Since May 21, EPA crews have been going door to door to take indoor air readings. Most homes we checked had no or very low levels of vapors. However, there are a number of homes where we found levels of vapors, called volatile organic compounds that could cause health concerns for residents. We continue to monitor these buildings and have met with the residents to discuss the situation at their house and talk about precautionary measures that should be taken to minimize the vapors in their residence.

We've installed temporary upgrades to the basement or crawlspace ventilation at a few houses. Large fans create positive pressure in the areas with high levels of vapors. The positive pressure keeps vapors from getting back into those spaces.

What precautionary measures can help?

- Read and follow the Oregon Health Authority's message "Health Effects of Exposure to Volatile Chemicals and What You Can Do to Prevent Them" attached to this fact sheet.
- Ventilation is still the most important measure that can be taken to get rid of vapors. Leave windows open for air flow. Create a cross draft by opening two windows and placing a fan in one of them. Try to bring in fresh air from outside.
- Fill in cracks or holes in cement basement floors and walls with products such as foam sealer.
- Put down a vapor barrier in crawl spaces where vapors might come up from the ground. Black plastic is one easily available option.
- Limit your time in any room where you smell an unusual odor.



Ducting brings fresh air to a heavy-duty fan, creating positive pressure, which keeps the vapors out of the basement.

What are the vapors?

We know that the vapors are primarily Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs). Preliminary information continues to indicate solvents and/or gasoline components

What we're doing now:

- We've detected vapors in homes and businesses, in the sewer, in the air, and in the soil and groundwater samples we've collected.
- Since May 28, we have focused efforts on investigating a wide range of potential sources and are gathering additional data that will help us better understand the situation.
- We continue to collect water and soil samples with a small drill rig to help determine the extent and source of the contamination.
- We continue to monitor homes with elevated levels of vapors.

What level of VOCs are a cause for concern?

Here in John Day, we are working with any residence with total volatile organic compounds exceeding 5 parts per million (5,000 parts per billion).

What happens next?

We believe the vapors are moving through groundwater. We don't know the exact source yet. We hope the information we get back from the laboratory will get us closer to understanding the cause.

We will continue to keep the residents informed through fact sheets, and the Blue Mountain Eagle and KJDY Radio have also provided useful information to the community.

EPA is working with the City of John Day, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, and the state and county health departments, to determine what the next steps are and who will be involved.

What Do I Do If I Smell Vapors in My House?

We're concerned that the vapors may continue to get into homes that haven't been impacted already. ***Please call the City of John Day Dispatch phone number if you smell an unusual odor in your house*** at 541-575-0030. If you have concerns about the health effects of vapors, call Grant County Health at 541-575-0429.

For More Information?

Call Kay Morrison
EPA Community Outreach at
206-295-1899

Visit the EPA Emergency Response website at:
www.epaossc.net/johnday

